



EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION FOR
THE EDUCATION OF ADULTS

RESPONSE TO THE CONSULTATION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION ON REINFORCING SOCIAL EUROPE

EAEA Statement
November 2020

The European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) is convinced that the European Pillar of Social Rights is a fundamental social strategy for the European Union to move in the direction of raising a community of solidarity which ensures and promotes the social rights of all citizens. EAEA welcomes the fact that the European Pillar of Social Rights is now a cornerstone of the European Semester.

“Everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and life-long learning.” **EAEA advocates for this right to (lifelong) learning and wants to reiterate the centrality of education, training and lifelong learning, as the first principle of the Pillar.** Education does not only support citizens to maintain and acquire skills, but also enables them to participate fully in society, managing challenges in the labour market and their personal life. The social strategy, outlined by the European Pillar of Social Rights, requires a strong adult education sector that can ensure that the transitions of digitalisation, demographic change, climate neutrality and the recovery from the covid-19 pandemic are socially fair and just. Moreover, adult learning and education is a key contributor for creating equal opportunities as well as enabling access to society, providing social protection and inclusion.

In the European Pillar of Social Rights, the European Union recognises the fundamental role of learning and access to education and training for social inclusion and cohesion throughout Europe. EAEA proposes a stronger coherence with **strategies and policies on education and lifelong learning, in particular the European Education Area, but, to a lesser extent, also the Skills Agenda:** while they mention lifelong learning, the concrete measures and actions proposed in the strategies and political frameworks do not adequately recognise the *right* to lifelong learning. Most measures and actions focus primarily on the formal education sector, thus missing the opportunity to fully embrace and incorporate the idea of lifelong and life-wide learning. The European Education Area, the guiding policy document for European education and lifelong learning for the next years, does neither deliver a sufficient, nor holistic picture of lifelong learning. Its six dimensions focus almost exclusively on the formal and leave out non-formal adult education and learning almost completely.

Participation in adult learning increased only slightly from 10.1% in 2014 to 10.8% in 2019. This trend shows that **more effort is needed to promote European policies and strategies to increase adult participation in lifelong learning** - and that endeavours at the EU level do not always trickle down to the national and regional levels. EAEA members (national and regional associations and providers) **agree that the European Pillar of Social Rights plays or can play an important role in promoting new national or regional policies and frameworks for adult learning.** However, EAEA is aware that enhancing the visibility and importance of European policies requires strong umbrella organisations, such as EAEA, who have the necessary means to advocate and inform their members.



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The data collected by EAEA for the 2020 Country Reports¹ show that the **European Pillar of Social Rights has been implemented mainly in countries with traditionally strong social welfare systems**, such as Finland, Sweden and Austria. EAEA members from these countries say that the Pillar has been fully implemented and that adult education policy in these countries is closely linked to social and labour market policy; however, they also point out that this was already the case before the European Pillar of Social Rights was even introduced. Members from some countries, e.g. from Germany, say that the first principle of the Pillar has *de facto* been implemented, but that the political frameworks at national and especially regional level do not always indicate that their development was motivated by the Pillar. This means that references to the European policy frameworks are missing and could result in repercussions on how the strength of EU policy-making in the field of adult learning and education is perceived in comparison to national and regional policy-making. However, for other countries, e.g. France, there is a clear link between the European Pillar of Social Rights and national legislation and policy-making on adult learning.

While in countries that have fully implemented the European Pillar of Social Rights, adult education organisations have been involved in a civil society consultation process and its implementation, other countries have rarely or not been consulted on the Pillar. EAEA **strongly suggests consulting civil society across adult learning on the Pillar in order to ensure a good cooperation between the stakeholders at the implementation level**. Furthermore, **civil society in adult learning and education needs structural and financial support** in order to be able to adequately support the implementation of the objectives of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

In the 2020 EAEA Country Reports survey, associations and providers of adult learning stressed that the **European Agenda for Adult Learning is the most important element of adult learning policy linking the Pillar to adult learning**. However, the Agenda will expire at the end of 2020, and so far the European Union has not proposed a follow-up programme or agenda. In Eastern European countries, e.g. Romania, the European Social Fund is mentioned as a main instrument for implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights. The future European Union policy frameworks and programmes will, therefore, be central to the further implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights in the Member States. **EAEA demands rapid action in terms of policy and programme development that includes a continuation of the European Agenda for Adult Learning**.

EAEA urges the European Commission:

- To **ensure stronger coherence** between the European Pillar of Social Rights and strategies and policies on adult education and lifelong learning
- To **increase its efforts in promoting European policies and strategies to increase adult participation in lifelong learning**

¹ The Country Reports represent the civil society view on the state of non-formal adult education in Europe. They are published each year and based on survey results that EAEA collects from its members.



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- To **promote the implementation of European policies such as the European Pillar of Social Rights** at the national and regional level

EAEA urges the EU Member States:

- To **recognise the right to (lifelong) learning**, as proclaimed in the European Pillar of Social Rights, in national education and lifelong learning systems
- To **involve civil society in adult learning** in the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights at the national and regional level
- To **support adult learning and education both structurally and financially** and **enable civil society in this sector to create national umbrella platforms** that can help with the implementation of the objectives of the Pillar

The European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) is the voice of non-formal adult education in Europe. EAEA is a European NGO with 130 member organisations in 43 countries and represents more than 60 million learners Europe-wide.